DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 247 961 JC 840 450

AUTHOR Mazman, Samuel
TITLE Computers Can Soothe Transfer Articulation.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Articulation (Education); *College Transfer Students; Community Colleges; Computer Oriented Programs; *Educational Counseling; *Intercollegiate Cooperation; Postsecondary Education; Program Descriptions; Program Development; *Transfer Policy
IDENTIFIERS *West Shore Community College MI

ABSTRACT

In order to solve the problem of students enrolling in courses not directly articulated with an ultimate goal, West Shore Community College (WSCC) developed a program using articulation data, master student records, and fee statements. The objectives of the program were to: (1) communicate information about the transferability of courses at the point of registration; (2) accommodate changes in students' intent with respect to their transfer institution; (3) facilitate the evaluation of community college students' transcripts by senior institutions; (4) develop an easier process for senior institutions to use in communicating course equivalencies to the community college; and (5) put the resolution of conflict over the transferability of credit at the institutional level rather than the student/institution level. To accomplish these objectives, a crosswalk of course transfer equivalencies was constructed for each of the senior institutions to which WSCC students generally transferred; the crosswalks were linked with the registration process to assess the transferability of the courses selected by the students in terms of their intended transfer institution; and messages regarding course transferability were sent to students on their fee receipts. WSCC, the transfer institutions, and the students have all benefited from the process, and plans are being developed for curriculum data banks for vocational program areas. (LAL)

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JC 840 450

COMPUTERS CAN SOOTHE TRANSFER ARTICULATION

Respectfully submitted:

Samuel Mazman, Ed.D.

Fall, 1984

COMPUTERS CAN SOOTHE TRANSFER ARTICULATION

Students who lose credit or are given "general elective" credit for courses they believed would satisfy specific requirements at a four-year institution are quick to communicate their plight to friends who may be considering the community college for the first two years of an undergraduate degree. Indeed, transfer programs at community colleges usually earn their credibility by virtue of how courses are evaluated and granted credit by the receiving senior institution.

Oftentimes, the community college is not the sole source of the problem and neither is the receiving institution. Articulation programs and agreements between institutions have become more prolific and problem free as both sender and receiver recognize that a smooth transition benefits both interests. Communicating the details of these programs in a timely way to students then becomes critical to the transfer process.

However, many community colleges do not require students to participate in counseling or academic advising sessions. In fact, colleges with on-line phone registration programs may allow students to enroll in courses without ever coming to the campus. Students residing in distant rural areas or who wish to avoid traffic congestion are spared the commitment of time and money to register, solving one problem. This solution, though, may create another problem by facilitating a high potential for enrolling in courses not directly articulated with an ultimate goal.

Our attempt to remedy this situation focused on the integration of

articulation data, master student record, and fee statement generation. Our first step was to build a crosswalk of course transfer equivalencies for each of the senior institutions to which most of our students transfer. All but a small percentage of students transferred to one of eight Michigan schools. Thus, eight banks of crosswalk data were created in the computer system.

Next, it was necessary to provide a linkage between these crosswalks and the registration process. Each senior institution was assigned a code number, and the registration program was expanded to allow the input of one of these codes as identified by the student. This, then, serves as a pointer to the appropriate crosswalk for that particular student's proposed schedule.

Finally, since our statement of fees includes a schedule of classes into which the student has enrolled, this seemed to be an ideal vehicle by which to communicate transfer messages. All students, regardless how they registered, are provided with a fee receipt either in person or by mail.

Four messages will appear individually or in combination depending on the transfer evaluation. They are as follows:

1. All courses transfer to (name of senior institution)
2. *This course does not transfer to (name of senior institution)
3. #This course transfers with restriction to (name of senior institution)
4. All other courses transfer to (name of senior institution)

Message 1 indicates a good choice of courses for the intended transfer institution. If a course on the schedule is flagged with an asterisk, message 2 will appear on the fee statement pointing out a poor choice. In the event a course is flagged with a pound sign, the student is informed that that course

transfers with restrictions such as departmental approval required or transfers for a certain major only, for example. Message 4 may accompany message 2 and/or 3 if appropriate.

There are additional capabilities built into the program. If after a semester or two a student should want to change the intended transfer institution, the entire transcript can be run against any of the crosswalks to determine what the effect will be. Our academic advisors are especially appreciative of this feature as it is no longer necessary to spend considerable time referencing hard copy articulation documents.

Upon transfer, the student may elect to take this transcript equivalency to the receiving institution. Once the evaluation is completed, the student can then determine if the courses transferred as anticipated by comparing our printout to the senior institution's evaluation. If discrepancies are noted, we then can enter into a dialogue with the receiving institution on behalf of the student. This avenue of resolution is of clear benefit to all three parties.

In addition, a copy of the transfer equivalency is attached to each official academic transcript sent to an educational institution as a matter of routine. This practice is extremely well received. Once we had established the credibility of our printouts with receiving admissions counselors/credentials analysts, their time spent evaluating our transcripts was considerably diminished.

As we develop new courses or make changes to current ones, senior institutions are quick to respond with their equivalency. Since our system is on-line and immediate they share our concern for accuracy. In fact, some admissions counselors from institutions which are not loaded into our system

have requested their involvement as they see it as a substantial marketing and recruitment tool.

An unexpected benefit was realized shortly after implementation. Senior institution admissions officers have used our comprehensive college printout to "persuade" certain of their division chairs to recognize our courses for credit when they may have been reluctant to do so previously. When the admissions officers can demonstrate that a large percentage of sister institutions are recognizing the course(s), there is less resistance to follow the trend.

In the past two years, we have experienced substantial growth in our reverse transfer population, e.g., students who started at or attended a senior institution and are transferring to the community college. Our time evaluating transcripts is considerably reduced as we need only to input the courses and are then given our equivalencies.

Finally, senior institutions get a printout of their individual equivalencies to update with an indication of any additions or changes made by the community college. This printout indicates our courses that have not changed and the senior equivalency in one section. A second section indicates our new courses or courses that have change for their evaluation. This is a vast improvement over the marked catalog approach used previously.

When we set out on the project, we had the following objectives:

1. Communication to student at point of registration about transferability
2. Accommodation of change of transfer institution
3. Facilitate comparison of community college suggested transfer credits with senior institution evaluation

4. Easier process for senior institution to communicate equivalencies to community college
5. Put resolution of conflict at institution/institution level rather than student/institution level

We feel we have met these objectives with some added unanticipated benefit.

The ease with which a project like this can be started and implemented depends in large part on the status of statewide articulation programs. Where a common core of general education requirements has been established and agreed to, i.e., six credit hours of English composition, eight credit hours of science to include at least one laboratory science, etc., development is relatively mechanical. More specialized courses, then, need to be negotiated by individual institutions.

This is the case in the State of Michigan where the Michigan Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO) have spearheaded the successful effort to establish a common core curriculum. Program design and implementation was primarily internal focusing on the efforts of the Data Processing staff and user input.

Where no such state organization exists, this kind of thrust may be the catalyst that could begin movement in a core curriculum direction. Given the very positive reactions we have had from both two-year and four-year institutions, there would seem to be an eagerness to work toward strong cooperation in the articulation process.

The equipment we use to run the program is currently an IBM System 34 with 128K memory and 128K megabyte hard disk storage. Memory use at the present time is 10K. The software is easily convertible to run on an IBM System 36, which is advantageous as the migration from a System 34 to the 36 is becoming a common migration.

A future enhancement in the planning stage is to develop curriculum data banks in the vocational/occupational program areas. The fee receipt would indicate whether or not a course was a part of that particular curriculum. For example, if a student with a declared major of Data Processing enrolled in a management course, that course would be flagged as "not normally a part of the Data Processing program." This is possible because most of our vocational programs are highly prescriptive.

Our approach to articulation certainly will not solve all the problems associated with the transfer process. However, we feel that it is better than the disappointment awaiting many students who learn that some of their coursework was interesting but not transferable.

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8118 Math-Sciences Building
Los Angeles, California 90024